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ABSTRACT

At an urban, open-door institution like Metropolitan State College in Denver, Colorado, many students enter college with some dificiencies in basic reading and writing skills. Therefore, the Reading Department at Metro State has attempted to meet the needs of the entire college through some multidisciplinary approaches to teaching reading. Reading improvement classes which emphasize reading in content areas are offered, but the program extends beyond the departmental walls. It includes (1) a six hours per week, team-taught block course which stresses an integrated approach to learning reading and writing skills, (2) support labs for Law Enforcement students, (3) a special class for meteorology students seeking to publish a journal of professional quality, (4) reading diagnosis for mechanical engineering technology students, (5) workshops and mini-classes in conjunction with the Skills Center and several departments, and (6) tutor training for tutors of the Skills Center, Veterans' Upward Bound, and similar programs at the college. (Author/MF)

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Summary

Reach Out with Reading

The Reading Program at Metropolitan State College

Elaine L. Cohen

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At an urban, open-door institution like Metropolitan State College in Denver, Colorado, many students enter college with some deficiencies in basic reading and writing skills. Therefore, the Reading Department at Metro State has attempted to meet the varied needs of the students through some multidisciplinary approaches to teaching reading. Reading Improvement classes which emphasize reading in content areas are offered, but the program extends beyond the departmental walls. The program includes a six-hour per week team-taught block course which stresses an integrated approach to learning reading and writing skills, support labs with Law Enforcement students, a special class for Meteorology students seeking to publish a journal of professional quality, reading diagnosis for Mechanical Engineering Technology students, workshops and mini-classes in conjunction with the Skills Center and several departments, and tutor training for tutors of the Skills Center, Veterans' Upward Bound, and similar programs at the college. The Reading Department must consider itself as serving the needs of the entire college.

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Reach Out With Reading

The Reading Program at Metropolitan State College

Elaine Cohen

Meteorology students monitoring weather instruments, policemen poring over Constitutional Law, Veterans preparing to enter college, and Chicano students studying Chicano culture are some of the students involved in a multidisciplinary approach to reading and writing instruction at Metropolitan State College in Denver. We know that reading is not an isolated activity and therefore should not take place in isolation. Rather, reading instruction is an integral part of every class and program and should occur in conjunction with other classes and programs.

Metropolitan State College in Denver, Colorado is an urban, open-door, four-year state college. The 8,000 students range in age from 18 to 71, with the average being 26; their backgrounds are diverse: 85% work; many have families; and they attend classes which are offered six days per week, from 7:30 am until 10:00 pm.

The Reading Program at Metropolitan State College is not a "remedial" program. Reading classes are not required. Through voluntary enrollment, about 300-400 students each quarter enroll for Reading Improvement classes which stress reading comprehension and study skills in the content areas. However, with such a transient, urban population (approximately 25% of potential continuing students drop out each quarter) many students' reading needs are not served through the regular class offerings. The Reading faculty must reach beyond its departmental walls.

The program includes Reading Improvement classes, reading-writing block class, support labs, workshops, tutor training, mini courses, and a variety of programs operated in conjunction with other departments.

The Block Class

A team-teaching approach to reading and writing skills was incorporated in an Elements of Communication class which meets in two-hour blocks, three days a week, for six hours credit. The class is taught by an English teacher and a reading teacher and stresses an integrated approach to learning reading and writing skills. For example, when students are learning to write topic sentences in paragraphs, they are also learning to read a paragraph for the main idea and to identify the topic and attitude; when they are writing paragraphs developed by illustrations and examples, they are also learning to read for significant details; and when they are learning

to make their writing coherent with such devices as transitional sentences, they are also learning to recognize signal words as reading aids.

Each class period begins with ten or fifteen minutes of sustained silent reading (2). Thus, reading becomes a habit even for those students who hate to read, because everyone is reading. In fact, when the instructors arrive, the students are usually sitting on the floor outside the classroom actually reading books!

The curriculum includes writing sentences, paragraphs, and essays; it also covers reading comprehension, such study skills as text reading, listening, note taking, and test taking, vocabulary skills (for both reading and writing purposes), and developing flexibility of reading rate.

The approaches to teaching are varied, and include lecture, discussions, discussion games, group efforts to solve problems or work exercises, movies, records, and video tapes. Both teachers are present, and sometimes take turns teaching or each works with a small group.

One example of a lesson is the unit on note taking. After the class discusses note-taking skills (each student's notes from his other classes are examined), a video tape is shown of a lecture from an upper division class at the college. The current favorite is a political science lecture entitled "Youth and Education in the Soviet Union." The students take notes on the lecture; their notes are checked, and later, after discussing different types of essay questions

and how to answer them, the students take a practice essay test over their notes. Students learn to think ahead so that they learn how to study, and consequently are amazed that it isn't considered cheating to preview a chapter and read the summary first. Having a purpose for reading or writing or note taking or preparing for exams is a new concept to them.

Individual Conferences

Besides group instruction, each student has a 20-30 minute reading conference as well as a writing conference each week with the instructors or trained peer tutors. The student's work is evaluated at each conference through a reading and writing contract. At the writing conference, the week's writing assignments are read and discussed. All assignments are appraised with the student present. At the reading conference attention is given to specific reading skills needed (e.g., vocabulary in context, structural analysis skills, reading the student's history text, etc.). These individual conferences are the key to success, for the student is reinforced as a human being, rather than as a mere number on a class roll. Since we began the individual conference system, students have shown a marked improvement in their attitudes about the course and about themselves.

Through this system, the instructor may discover that a student who appears not to read well because his comprehension scores on multiple choice tests are low (as on S.R.A. or controlled reading exercises) actually does understand what he has read but is not a

test-wise student. Further, by talking with a student, the instructor witnesses and understands the student's thinking processes. Some students who appear to have few basic skills have demonstrated critical thinking ability when the material is relevant to their lives. It is possible to analyze specific problems during an individual conference and to make suggestions based on feedback from the student. Also, it is possible to discuss the ideas in other courses he is taking, to talk about a psychology text and examine its vocabulary, or to teach the syllabication skills which the student couldn't get on the S.R.A. Power Builder (if that is the material he chose for practice). But most important, students re-affirm themselves as worthwhile human beings.

Beyond Reading and English

Meteorology Field Program

During spring and summer, fifteen meteorology students ride circuit daily on a network of instruments and recording devices or monitor hail storms in the radar room or fly with research aircraft over Northeastern Colorado as they participate in the National Hail Research Experiment. The students want to write the results of their field experience and requested help with their writing and reading skills. A course has been established with an English writing teacher working with the students at the field site and in the city classroom to produce a publication of professional quality.

Law Enforcement Support Lab

The head of the Law Enforcement department wants educated policemen. Therefore, once a week the students who are studying Constitutional Law meet with a writing and reading teacher for a support lab which provides them with one extra credit and help in reading the law briefs and in writing clear, concise reports. The writing and reading teachers work with the Law Enforcement faculty in defining the skills necessary for success in the class. The texts from the class serve as texts for the lab.

Mechanical Engineering Technology

A member of the Mechanical Engineering Technology faculty approached the reading department for assistance in procedures for evaluating potential engineering technologists. A reading inventory was taken from the ASEE's 1972 report on Engineering Technology, with questions developed by the Reading Faculty. The test contained four parts designed to measure comprehension of an extended reading, short paragraph comprehension, ability to read charts and graphs, and vocabulary in context. The Diagnostic Spelling Test of the Relevance of Words Kit (4) was given and the students were referred to the Skills Center if they wanted to work on their weaknesses. A writing sample was scored on a five-point scale by a member of the English Department. A study is under way to correlate performance of the students in subsequent classes with the diagnostic results, with an ultimate goal to develop a series of tests to help with advising of

students when they enter the program. Students who have weaknesses are referred to the Skills Center for tutoring and advising.

Tutoring and Tutor Training

The Reading Department participates in a program of tutor training for tutors in the Skills Center, Upward Bound, Veteran's Upward Bound, Weekend and Evening College, and Project '75. The emphasis is on the need to work with reading and study skills in every area (including mathematics). The Skills Center and Reading Lab are in close proximity, but tutoring also reaches out. Tutors are working in every building: in the math lab, in the science building, at Weekend College, in the Student Activities Center and at the Urban Studies Center. The tutors are Metro State students on work-study grants who are able to work 15 hours per week at their tutoring jobs, students receiving credit through practicum classes or seminars, or student volunteers. The reading faculty meets with the tutors to discuss the needs of their students in reading and study skills and to explain the use of Reading Lab materials.

Support Courses in Economics, History, and Chicano Studies

The Economics, History, and Chicano Studies departments have indicated an interest in employing the support lab concept in conjunction with classes where students show deficiency in reading and writing and study skills. The details are being worked out, and in each case the text and outside readings of the course will be the

materials for the support lab. An informal diagnostic test is being devised in each area, and strong tutorial assistance is planned.

Mini Courses and Workshops

Other alternatives to classes are the workshop and the mini-course. A writing workshop was developed this year with the primary emphasis on a lab approach to writing, with several tutors aiding an instructor. A workshop in reading and writing skills was designed for foreign students. A reading workshop is being developed this spring quarter. Several mini-courses have been or are being designed to cover study skills, reading graphs and charts, studying in the sciences, using the library, etc.

All of these new classes an' approaches have developed after numerous discussions with the college faculty. This kind of reaching out requires personal contact and a willingness to cooperate with other faculty and students to determine the needs in each area and to provide for constant evaluation. The Reading Department must consider itself as serving the needs of the entire college and therefore must continue to reach out.

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